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Written statement* submitted by the International Federation for the Protection of the Rights of Ethnic, Religious, Linguistic & Other Minorities, a non-governmental organization on the roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[28 August 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Alawites, a religious minority in Syriaa community in danger of extermination

Since the rise of jihadism in the Middle East, the fate of Muslim minorities has become a major concern for the international community.

For persecuted Christians in Iraq or Syria, an international human chain came forward.

The Yazidi minority in Iraq whose men are shot and whose women and children reduced to slavery by the Islamic State have also given rise to unprecedented sympathy in Europe and throughout the world.

The Kurdish resistance and particularly the women combatants who have courageously defended Kobane (Ayn al-Arab) conquered the heart of public opinion.

On the other hand, Alawites have not benefited from any momentum of sympathy although they are the prime victims of terrorist groups.

Syria is inhabited by some 2,8 million members of this religious minority.

Alawites live mostly in their historical stronghold, Ansari Jebel, a mountain chain which extends north-south parallel to the Syrian coast.

Confined to the Jebel for almost a millennium because of its heterodox Islam, this community was allowed to go down to the cities only owing to the creation of modern Syria and the accession of the Ba'ath party.

Since the 1960s, tens of thousands of Alawites have left the provinces of Latakia and Tartus to settle in the cities of Homs and Damascus.

Driven by misery, most of the young Alawites for centuries swelled the ranks of the army, almost the only perspective of this marginalized minority. A legend tells that Alawites have a flat head because of their fathers tapping them at the back of the head saying: "Go to Damascus to become a soldier."

Their relative over-representation in the ranks of the Syrian army, which is secular and multi-confessional, is today the excuse for the jihadist groups to sow anti-Alawite hatred and create confessional polarization in the country. Even so-called "moderate" opposition groups regularly use "nusayri", a disparaging term for Alawite, in degrading expressions such as "Nusayri regime", "Nusayri army", "Nusayri dictatorship" to exhort Sunni Muslims to repudiate Syrian institutions and the army.

Some Western media outlets, strategists and observers also relay the fiction of an Alawite plot within the Syrian State. The Syrian State is multi-confessional on all levels: army, police, administration, judicial authorities, political parties such as the powerful Ba'ath are all mixed institutions.

The Vice-President of the Republic, Ms Nasjah Attar, the Prime Minister Wael Al Halqi, the head of intelligence Ali Mamluk and most of the ministers such as Defense Minister Fahd Jassem el Freij and Foreign Affairs Minister Walid Muallem are Sunnis.

Contrary to countries like Turkey, "secular" although very much anti-Alevi, or Saudi Arabia or Bahrain, which practice discriminatory policies toward Shias, Syria has never known confessional apartheid under Ba'ath domination nor today's president.

The demonization to which the Alawites are subjected in the war in Syria takes pernicious forms. For instance, it is not rare to find very serious Western publications commenting the war in Syria from the angle of a Sunni/Alawite conflict

while the Syrian conflict is essentially political, ideological, geo-strategic and mainly triggered by external actors. Accusing the Alawites of being at war against the Sunnis and vice-versa reinforces distrust between these two communities.

Conservative Syrian milieus, which have a tendency to reduce everything to religious and confessional identities, espouse such a view. Neither do they make any secret of their project to purge Syria of Alawites. Although anti-Alawite hatred is millennial, a major intensification occurred in opposition circles before and after the "Syrian spring". It was precisely by radicalizing their xenophobic speech focused on the Alawites that armed groups grew to prominence.

In August 2013, three Alawite truck drivers from Tartus were humiliated then executed in Anbar in Iraq for not having prayed in the Sunni manner. Their executioner Abu Wahib, a fearsome chief of Daesh, earned the nickname „Alawite hunter", which even increased his popularity among Syrian opposition groups.

Today, after four years of war, the so-called "liberated" zones are declared cleared of Alawite presence. This means that no Alawite has the right to live in the Jabhat Al-Nusra Emirate nor in the Caliphate of the Islamic State. And the first question terrorist groups ask a captured loyalist is: Alawite or Sunni?

Hamza Aleyan, a member of the Syrian military arrested in Jisr al-Choghur in April 2015 answered the fateful question: "Yes, brother Alawite, brother." He had barely uttered the sentence when the executor finished him off by machine gun. Then he turned towards the camera and shouted: "I swear by Allah that we will cut their throats of all of them to the last."

The Alawite has therefore no chance of surviving in the rebel-controlled areas. He is in fact not considered one of the people of the Book, unlike Jews or Christians. For their part, the Alawites refuse to speak about the genocide of which they are victims for fear of distancing themselves from majority Islam and thus setting themselves apart from their neighbours and Sunni brothers. One will recall that the only regions where Alawites and Sunnis live together in a relative harmony are the government-controlled zones. Throughout the war, the two coastal provinces of Alawite majority, Latakia and Tartus, have welcomed hundreds of thousands of fleeing Sunnis and Christians.

Accusing the Alawites of confessionalism, as purveyed in some media, is thus nonsense because Alawites do not proselytize nor are they sectarian. They struggle for their survival by hiding their identity as much as possible and by taking refuge in Syrian patriotism. If the coastal provinces which shelter the Alawite minority fall into the hands of jihadist groups, a veritable genocide will occur. In November 2012, the executive director of the Global Center for the Responsibility to Protect, Simon Adams, predicted that the next genocide in the world would be that of the Alawites. This genocide is now under way in the face of general indifference and deafening silence.

The Jabhat Al-Nusra, the Syrian Branch of Al-Qaeda, is at the door of Latakia and Tartus. This terrorist group, which is considered less cruel than Daesh, promises nevertheless to exterminate the Alawites down to the last person. On 4 August 2013, Jabhat Al-Nusra supported by several brigades of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) said to be "moderate", took control of 11 Alawite villages in the mountains of Latakia. The massacre that ensued was of atrocious savagery.

At present, Jabhat Al-Nusra is moving in force towards Latakia, and it will not be possible to say that we did not know.